



## **Superior Court of California County of Riverside**

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### **NEWS For Immediate Release**

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### **Riverside County's Drug Courts Celebrate 10 Years of Success**

Riverside County - Salvaging lives, reuniting families, saving taxpayer dollars - these are just a few of the remarkable results achieved by Riverside County's drug court programs over the past ten years. The Riverside County Superior Court and its collaborative justice partners will mark these and other accomplishments with an anniversary celebration at the Riverside Historic Courthouse on Friday, September 30, 2005, at 2:00 p.m. The ceremony will include remarks from Presiding Judge Sharon Waters, Judge Paul Dickerson, and keynote speakers Assemblyman John Benoit and Bill Lohr, Field Representative for State Senator Jim Battin, who each will address the importance of Drug Court to the community. State and local legislators, city and county officials, and members of the Riverside County Superior Court Bench will be in attendance. In what promises to be a heartwarming highlight of the program, several drug court graduates will share their life stories and how Drug Court helped them turn their lives around.

Drug courts require a coordinated, therapeutic "team" approach by the Court, District Attorney, Public Defender, law enforcement, Probation, County Office of Education, Department of Public Social Services, County Counsel, Mental Health, treatment providers, Economic Development Agency, local bar associations, and other community-based services. The team creates an environment in which clear and certain rules require absolute compliance from participants during the yearlong program. Frequent drug testing and court appearances are mandatory. The Drug Court judge may order sanctions for noncompliance, up to and including termination from the program and incarceration in a juvenile, county, or state detention facility. All treatment drug courts engage the client in a schedule of structured education and drug treatment. Curriculum includes recovery skills, GED preparation and remedial academic education, a 16-week parenting course, Nurturing Families classes, relapse

prevention and recovery classes, drug education, HIV testing and education, and random weekly drug testing. The focus of the drug court experience is to address socially irresponsible behavior, criminality, drug use and addiction, educational deficiencies, and reinforce positive family roles.

Judge Paul Dickerson, Chair of the Drug Court Oversight Committee, states, "Society's goal is sobriety and the best means to achieve that end includes Drug Court. Long, closely monitored programs that hold people accountable seem to be the best way to achieve that goal. In all cases, either the cycle of addiction is broken or the offender suffers further consequences." Dickerson added, "Drug Court is not a way for individuals to try and escape responsibility for their actions. You can't bluff your way through a drug court program."

Riverside County offers four drug court programs to offenders. Dependency and family drug courts are designed to preserve the family and provide for the safety, protection, and physical and emotional well-being of the children by providing substance abuse treatment and other services to parents. The Riverside Family Law Substance Abuse Court, created in 1999, has graduated 64 clients to date and mothers participating in the program have given birth to 13 drug free-babies. All of the 15 active participants in the Hemet Family Law Substance Abuse Court (2005) have complied with the program's employment requirements and three families have been reunified under the program. Nineteen children have been returned to parents participating in the Indio Unified Family Substance Abuse Court, and eight drug-free babies have been born to its mothers since the program's inception in 2004. The Riverside Dependency Drug Court (2002) and the Southwest Justice Center Dependency Drug Court (2003), with a total of 60 active participants, have graduated 41 clients and reunited 130 children with their families. Women participating in the programs have given birth to 21 drug-free babies. Riverside's dependency and family drug courts also benefit the community by increasing employment rates among its participants, requiring offenders to perform community service, reducing foster care costs, and reducing neonatal care costs for drug-addicted babies. (Department of Public Social Services statistics indicate that of the 6,975 open dependency cases in 2004, 80% resulted from drug abuse by a parent.)

Juvenile and adult treatment drug courts are criminal courts that offer offenders alcohol and drug treatment in an effort to eliminate or reduce jail time. The mission of Riverside's adult and juvenile drug courts is to stop the abuse of alcohol and other drugs and related criminal activity. In exchange for successful completion of the yearlong treatment program and up to one year of aftercare, the court may dismiss the original charge, reduce or set aside a sentence, offer a lesser penalty, or offer a combination of these measures. The judge is the central figure in a team effort that focuses on sobriety, public safety, and accountability as its primary goals. Drug court establishes an environment that the client can understand - a system in which clear choices are presented and individuals are encouraged to take control of their own recovery. The Recovery Opportunity Center, Riverside County's first drug court program, was established in 1995 and to date has graduated 326 clients out of 590

participants. The Indio Recovery Opportunity Center (1999) has graduated 237 of its 480 participants. The Juvenile Delinquency Drug Court, established in 1998, currently with 23 active clients, has successfully graduated 49 of 295 juveniles. Of those participants, three have given birth to drug-free babies. Additionally, program participants have completed 1,377 hours of service to the community.

Pamela Miller, Collaborative Justice Coordinator for the court, states, "Drug courts have outperformed all other treatment strategies because of the intensive supervision of the court and the minimum twelve months that the clients are required to be involved in a program. Beyond a 90-day threshold, treatment outcomes improve in a direct relationship to the length of time spent in a program. The length of time an addict spends in treatment is a reliable predictor of his or her post-treatment performance." Miller added, "Riverside's drug courts have incorporated educational components that involve the entire family, which build healthier and more nurturing lifestyles. We still need to do more to involve communities and their resources, the one piece of the puzzle that's still missing."

The nation's first drug court was established in 1989 by former U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno during her tenure as state attorney in Dade County, Florida. Drug courts are now a mainstay of the judicial system's effort to rehabilitate drug offenders and currently number over 1,600 throughout the 50 states and the District of Columbia, including 158 drug courts in California.

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